

is an important thing because restoring our social fabric is critical. And providing the opportunity for work, protecting the worker, and helping to keep families and communities together are crucial elements in achieving that social fabric. And so is protecting our citizens' safety on the streets, in homes, and in our schools. That's why we enacted the Brady bill, to put common sense into gun selling, and why when Congress returns next week, I will ask them to quickly pass the crime bill and send it to me for signing.

Step by step, we are reviving our economy, renewing our sense of common community, and restoring our people's confidence that our Nation can be strong at home and abroad and our Government can work for the benefit of ordinary Americans.

Yes, we've done a lot, but we have so much more to do.

As we enter this second year of taking on these challenges together, we know this: What's important is not just how many programs we pass but how many lives we improve. What's important is not just what we do for people but also what we can help our people to do for themselves. Ultimately, that will be the measure of our success.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 6 p.m. on January 21 in the East Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on January 22.

Teleconference Remarks on the Los Angeles Earthquake January 24, 1994

The President. Hello.

Q. Hello, Mr. President.

Q. Good morning, Mr. President.

The President. It's good to hear your voice. I've got Federico, Henry, and James Lee on the phone?

Q. Yes, sir.

The President. That's great. Well, I know you've all been working very hard. I know there was a problem with the overcrowding at the disaster assistance centers at first, but I'm really pleased by the work you've done. And I was glad to note in this morning's Los Angeles Times an acknowledgement that we'd gotten those centers up more quickly than in previous disasters and that things seem to be going better. But why don't you all give me a briefing. James Lee, why don't you start and just give me an overall briefing about where we are.

[Federal Emergency Management Agency Director James Lee Witt explained the emergency response team's efforts to assist earthquake victims and stated that FEMA was in the process of providing applicants with disaster assistance checks.]

The President. How long will it take to get the checks out?

Director Witt. We had checks coming out yesterday, and we will have thousands of checks

coming out each day, and there will be more each day coming out. We're processing them very quick.

The President. What about the language barriers?

Director Witt. We have worked with Secretary Cisneros and Secretary Pena and other Cabinet Secretaries and the State and local emergency management people in all of the language barriers, in printing every type of information in every language of that community.

The President. That's good. You mentioned Secretary Riley. I know he's on the way back, but we got a report from him, and I've already directed the Department of Education to send \$7 million to the school district there to provide emergency services for the students. That may not be enough, but it will get them started anyway. And I'm glad to hear that.

Henry, where are we on the housing situation?

[Secretary Henry Cisneros discussed the availability of tents and shelters for victims who lost their homes, as well as use of a voucher system to provide permanent housing.]

The President. You know, there were a lot of other communities affected. What about their housing? I mean, what kind of system do we

have to make sure we get out there to the other communities, too?

[Secretary Cisneros stated that HUD was working closely with housing authorities in surrounding communities.]

The President. Now, I know that only a minority of the houses had earthquake insurance, but what about those that had insurance? Are the insurance companies there? Are they speeding up payment? What's going to happen there?

Director Witt. Yes, sir, they are there. They're in there speeding up the payments as quick as possible.

[Secretary Cisneros explained that many people did not have earthquake insurance because of high premiums and high deductibles.]

The President. Is the voucher system the preferred way of dealing with this? I mean, are you going to come back and—will that be part of the supplemental that Leon Panetta sends up to Congress?

Secretary Cisneros. We've extended in this first effort 10,000 vouchers. I believe we probably will need to be on the safe side and ask for more. So the answer is, yes, it will be in the supplemental.

The President. Federico, what about the transportation situation? How are we doing with cleaning up the debris and at least preparing to go to work?

[Secretary Federico Peña described Federal, State, and local efforts to rebuild the highway system and deal with traffic congestion.]

The President. What about getting—if we had more rail cars, would they be full?

Secretary Peña. Yes. We have—

The President. What do we have to do to get more cars? And what about the buses? How many buses are out there? How many more can we get?

[Secretary Peña discussed cooperation between Federal agencies and private businesses to provide more buses and rail cars to help deal with the transportation crisis.]

The President. On the contracting work, we heard from the labor council out here, even here at the White House, they said they really wanted to help and do whatever they could to make sure that all the work was speeded up and as much was done as possible. So I know

you're getting good cooperation from the labor people out there, too.

[Secretary Peña stated that contractors and city mayors had been very helpful in providing suggestions and assistance.]

The President. The Labor Department, we were in contact with them, and I know they've already committed another \$3 million just to pay people to do the emergency and clean-up work. But I think the fact that we're ahead of schedule on that is important. And I know you're going to follow up on the question of how quickly then highway construction can be done, because, obviously, if you could do longer work weeks or 24-hour days in some of those places, it would make a big difference.

[Secretary Peña explained that construction workers were working long hours to repair the highway system.]

The President. Well, that's great. I was informed right before I came out to talk to you that Leon Panetta will be in a position to give me a report today, as I had asked last week, on the supplemental. Obviously, the mayor and all the folks, the local leadership in the Los Angeles area and the State folks have been very good about helping us to get the loss figures. So I think we'll be in pretty good shape today to know a little more than we have known for the last few days on what we can ask for from Congress when they come back. So I will follow up on that end.

I'm very encouraged that the lines have gone down some at the disaster assistance centers. And I just hope that we can just keep on top of all this. I appreciate the fact that all of you have stayed out there. I think that has been very good. And again, I want to compliment all the local folks. I'm sure there are a lot of people out there who have hardly slept since I was there a few days ago. So you all just keep your chins up and keep working at it. And we'll do what we can here to get the supplemental passed in a hurry.

[Secretary Cisneros stated that he would be working with church leaders and volunteer services to provide help to those who are having difficulty dealing with their experiences.]

The President. That's terrific. I think they can do an enormous amount of good. Cardinal Mahony obviously is very concerned about these

things, and he's got an awful lot of able leaders there among the priests and the nuns who can, I think, make a real difference. I've been in a lot of their schools, their community organizations. And there's also a very large evangelical community there and other religious groups. So I'm glad you're involving them; they can make a huge difference.

If there's anything else we need to know back here, let us know. But we'll be able to give you a report back about what we think the supplemental will look like probably before the end of the day. And then we'll just have to keep working together closely over the next few days

as the situation unfolds. And if you know more—because it will take a few days for Congress to act on this, obviously, so we'll have some time. But I hope we can nail down the broad outlines this afternoon.

Thank you very much, and give my regards to the mayor and everybody else out there.

Secretary Cisneros. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Thanks.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:59 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Roger Cardinal Mahony, Archbishop of Los Angeles.

Exchange With Reporters

January 24, 1994

Secretary of Defense Nominee

Q. Mr. President, how close are you to naming a Defense Secretary?

The President. I think we'll have an announcement today, just in a few hours.

Q. Is Bill Perry your choice, Mr. President?

The President. We'll have an announcement. You can wait and see.

Q. Why do you think it took so long, and what do you account for what seemed to be a reluctance by a number of people to take on the job?

The President. Well, I don't think it has taken that long. I mean, it's been, what, a week—less than a week since Mr. Inman said he didn't want the job.

Q. And at least two people who reportedly have said they weren't interested in the job, and Mr. Perry—

The President. But the stories are basically inaccurate. The only accurate story is the one that I have confirmed, which is that I talked to Senator Nunn during the transition before I became President, based on the fact that he was not only the head of the Senate Armed Services Committee but a longtime personal friend of mine and someone I sought advice from on these matters. And he told me then that he was not interested in being Secretary of Defense. And the only thing I did was to call him back and make sure he had the same position then that he had now.

The job was absolutely not offered to anyone else, absolutely, categorically not offered to anyone else. And it wasn't really offered to him. I just said, "Are you still in the same position you were in before?" And he said, "That's right." He said, "I'm doing what I think I should be doing." But he knows, I think—I don't want to overstate it. I think Sam Nunn always knew that if he were ever interested in that job, that I was very open to that. But—so the decision—then, after that, after it was clear that he was in the same position he was always in, I went about trying to pick a successor. I've done it, and I expect to have an announcement.

Q. Do you think you can twist someone's arm to take it?

The President. No.

Bosnia

Q. Mr. President, there have been new calls for air strikes in Bosnia. You talked about that a lot over this past trip to Europe. Can you give us any update? And what about what you said was your resolve to do something about this?

The President. Well, what I said was that NATO should not reaffirm its position unless the circumstances that they set out for bombing, if those circumstances occurred they'd be willing to go forward. Now, I presume you're referring to what was said in the European Parliament yesterday.